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SUBJECT: SCENESETTER FOR MAY 26 VISIT OF CODEL INHOFE

REF: PRISTINA 437

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SENSITIVE BUT UNCLASSIFIED, PROTECT ACCORDINGLY

¶1. (SBU) SUMMARY. The new Kosovo government, formed in March after the death of President Ibrahim Rugova in January, is focused on status negotiations, implementation of the "Standards for Kosovo" program, and the transfer of governing competencies as UNMIK winds down its presence in Kosovo. Although the United Nations-facilitated final status negotiations have made some headway, they have failed to produce major breakthroughs on the decentralization of government services and the preservation of cultural and religious heritage, the two topics considered to date. The international community continues to press Kosovo government leaders to implement the Standards more quickly, especially with regard to minority rights. The situation for Kosovo's Serbs throughout Kosovo remains difficult, and the ongoing boycott of Kosovo political institutions by Kosovo Serb leaders compounds matters. The removal of KFOR's last fixed checkpoint north of the Ibar River has reduced the international community's ability to exercise influence over potential trouble-spots in the Serb-majority north. END SUMMARY.

¶2. (SBU) The United Nations Special Envoy for Kosovo Status Talks, former Finnish President Martti Ahtisaari, has presided over five sessions of the final status settlement process in Vienna. Given that the bottom lines of the Pristina and Belgrade delegations are diametrically opposed, with Belgrade ruling out independence for Kosovo and Pristina refusing to consider any other result, Ahtisaari started the talks with topics that are not obviously status-dependent -- decentralization of government services and preservation of cultural and religious heritage. Basic principals have been agreed on but few concrete issues have been resolved. Ahtisaari and his team have collected proposals and the international community has urged both sides to make further compromises. On a May 21-23 visit to Kosovo, Ambassador

Frank Wisner, the Secretary's special representative for the Kosovo final status talks, told Kosovo Albanians they must be more flexible and more generous if they expect to conclude the talks favorably (reftel).

¶3. (SBU) Although the prior "Standards before status" policy has been largely abandoned, the Contact Group (U.S. UK, France, Germany, Italy, Russia) is still urging Kosovo Albanian leaders to make visible progress on Standards implementation concurrently with status negotiations. Concrete steps are under way to resolve property disputes, fight corruption, reconstruct homes and religious sites, improve freedom of movement for minorities and to pass laws on religious freedom, language and cultural heritage.

¶4. (SBU) UNMIK is downsizing and continues the transfer of competencies to the Kosovo Provisional Institutions of Self Government (PISG). A new Ministry of Justice and Ministry of Interior have been established in recent months. UNMIK offices at all levels are reducing staffing levels and training local staff to take over their functions.

¶5. (SBU) Kosovo's new President Fatmir Sejdiu and new Prime Minister Agim Ceku have taken concrete steps to reach out to Kosovo Serbs, including visits to Serb communities and cultural sites, public statements in Serbian language, and calls for Kosovo Albanians to make Serbs feel welcome in Kosovo. However, local leaders and the Kosovo Albanian public need to do more at the grassroots level to overcome the perception of insecurity still felt by Kosovo Serbs, many of whom fear to venture beyond their isolated, mostly rural enclaves.

¶6. (SBU) Many Kosovo Serbs, worried that the status negotiations will ultimately produce an independent Kosovo with an overwhelmingly (93 percent) ethnic Albanian

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population, are weighing whether to stay in Kosovo or relocate to Serbia. In most cases, neither option is particularly attractive with poverty a virtual certainty no matter which side of the Kosovo-Serbia administrative boundary line is chosen. The recent demand by Belgrade's Kosovo Coordination Center (CCK) that Kosovo Serb teachers and healthcare workers working for Belgrade-run "parallel institutions" reject salaries provided by the PISG has further entrenched their isolation from Kosovo society and institutions, and left them wondering whether Belgrade has their best interests in mind. Kosovo Serb leaders elected in 2004 lament that Belgrade will not allow them to return to the PISG and take up their seats in the Assembly, despite constant urging to do so by the international community.

¶7. (SBU) UNMIK control over the Serb-majority areas north of the Ibar River, adjacent to Serbia proper, remains tenuous at best. In the north, Belgrade controls schools, healthcare, social welfare and utilities. There is also some Belgrade influence over the Kosovo Police Service (KPS) in the north, with some KPS officers more-or-less overtly employed by the Serbian interior ministry (MUP). In recent weeks, French KFOR, which oversees northern Kosovo, removed the last fixed checkpoint north of the Ibar River running through the ethnically divided city of Mitrovica. KFOR headquarters is currently considering reinstatement of a fixed presence as the status process reaches fruition.

¶8. (SBU) COMMENT. This is an exciting time to visit Kosovo. Kosovo Albanians believe their dreams are coming close to fulfillment, although they are becoming frustrated with delays in the process and begin to understand the magnitude of the concrete compromises they will have to make in order to get there. Kosovo Albanian leaders have made positive first steps to reach out to Kosovo Serbs, but more practical measures are needed to ensure Kosovo Serbs stay in Kosovo and participate in building a multi-ethnic society. KFOR must re-assert control in northern Kosovo, to prevent unrest and

possible attempts by hard-liners to secede when final status is announced. END COMMENT.

19. (U) Post clears this message in its entirety for release to Special Envoy Ahtisaari.
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